

Outdoor Adventure Leadership at Laurentian University

by Jim Little

Graduating with a Bachelor of Physical and Health Education (BPHE) degree with a specialty in Outdoor Adventure Leadership is a unique reality in Canada offered by Sudbury's Laurentian University. Developed over 20 years ago, the Outdoor Adventure Leadership (ADVL) program has been one of Laurentian's six landmark Human Kinetics programs. From a scholastic perspective the ADVL students (nicknamed ADVLers) are striving to become competent leaders in the outdoors by acquiring sound theoretical knowledge, building their technical skills and participating in a wide range of enriching educational and work-related experiences, all the while hoping to develop a lucrative career after graduation. With top-notch students and a powerhouse of professors and instructors, the ADVL program is poised for international recognition in the outdoor adventure marketplace.

The ADVL program is soundly based on three key elements: academic knowledge, professional orientation and technical certification. These three elements are highlighted throughout the four-year undergraduate degree requirements. As Dr. Couture states in the Spring 2001 issue of *Pathways*, "ADVL is a holistic program that promotes personal growth, develops leadership skills and trains individuals to be safety-minded in a variety of outdoor settings." This philosophy holds true today; the program provides a balanced mix of scholarly pursuits and outdoor field-related experiences that challenge the mind, body and soul.

Academic Knowledge

Academics are a key component in the ADVL program, which hones each student's theoretical knowledge in physical and health education. A well-rounded core first year includes courses in Exercise Science, Human Movement, Anatomy, Kinesiology and North

American Native Studies. In second, third and fourth years, each student builds on this base by taking program-specific courses such as Outdoor Education, Adventure Leadership and Adventure Therapy. These specific courses help the student develop theoretical knowledge and enjoy a smooth transition to their practical application. To remain in the program, students are required to maintain a 60% average, yet they are encouraged to maintain a 70% average, which would result in an honours designation with their degree. With a sound foundation of theoretical knowledge and the requirement to maintain a high academic standard, the students are helped to excel in an industry that demands the constant application of this knowledge in real-life situations.

Professional Orientation

The ADVL program is committed to orienting students to their future career paths in outdoor adventure leadership by offering courses that encompass both the theory and practical application of the outdoor adventure scene. Core courses aptly named Expedition Planning, Risk Management and Wilderness Emergency Management add to the rock solid platform that the students will develop throughout their four years of study.

The ADVL program strives to offer a practical hands-on approach to students by offering practicum and internship opportunities. Independent study practicums take many shapes and sizes but are focused on outdoor adventure-based learning. For instance, 40-hour practicum positions may include working with local tourism businesses, involvement in outdoor community events, assisting outdoor education school groups, being a Teaching Assistant in one of Laurentian's Human Kinetics activity classes or being a board member of a university-sanctioned club.

Third-year ADVler Dave Marrone is currently doing his practicum by running the school's Outers Club. Through this club, Marrone is able to gain experience promoting and leading outdoor activities around Sudbury through his self-developed Web site at www.sudburyoutside.ca. With the development of this site, Marrone is aligned with his future plans of "starting a small guiding company" when he graduates. Each ADVL student must also embark on a more intense practical experience either by participating in a 400-hour internship position or leading an international expedition.

The working internship provides the student with the opportunity to experience the realities of the working field of adventure activity alongside a community mentor. Through this experience, the student must formulate achievable scholarly objectives and produce tangible benefits to the organization in which they are working. The international expedition option provides the student with the opportunity to plan, prepare and lead a wilderness excursion outside Canada. Julie Bremner, a third-year ADVler, on top of her active life as a student, is "trying to do a certificate in environmental biology and lead an international backpacking expedition to Spain" in the summer of 2007. The ADVL program has a unique career-oriented array of both theory and practical courses to help prepare its graduates for entry into the demanding world marketplace.

Technical Certifications

Industry standards in the outdoor adventure field are becoming rigorous and closely regulated and monitored by government and industry players. These rising standards are making it tougher for individuals to find their niche in the outdoor adventure market. The increasing costs and availability of relevant technical certifications also creates its own set of hurdles. Laurentian's ADVL program coordinator and professors anticipated these issues, and through strategic partnership agreements with certifying organizations (as well as having in-house certified instructors to deliver the programs), they can offer cost-effective technical certifications to their students.

Throughout the four-year program, ADVL students have the choice of taking up to 15 nationally recognized technical certifications. Ontario Recreational Canoe and Kayak



Association (ORCKA) certificates, Swift Water Rescue Technician (SRT), National Life Saving Society (NLS), Wilderness First Responder (Sirius Wilderness Medicine) and Top-roper Rock Climbing Instructor (L'École Nationale d'Escalade du Québec) are a few of the certifications offered. To streamline the delivery of technical skills acquisition, many of the certifications are offered through degree required courses. The best example of these course offerings is "Summer Session," where students five weeks of technical training in wilderness pursuits (with certifications) before graduation. Academic certification courses in Sea Kakaying, White Water Canoeing, Swift Water Rescue, Rock Climbing and Canoe Tripping fill the bill in this intensive period of training.

Many of these certification courses go above and beyond the minimum certification requirements (as set out by the certification organization). For instance, an ORCKA Canoe Tripping Level 2 (Trip Leader-CT2) certification that requires candidates to participate in a five-day wilderness canoe trip is currently blended into the ADVL Advanced Wilderness Canoe Tripping course. However, the requirements for the canoe tripping course are designed specifically for students to plan, prepare and participate in a minimum 14-day remote wilderness canoe trip held somewhere in the northern climes of Canada. This far surpasses the minimum certification requirement of a five-day trip. Previous annual Advanced Wilderness Canoe Trips have been run throughout Northern Ontario in the James Bay Watershed (Missinaibi River, Kattawagami River, Harricanaw River), Northern Quebec (Pontax River) and Manitoba (Bloodvein River).

The ADVL program at Laurentian University is a demanding one. The course load and personal time commitment is typically heavier than what is required in other university degree programs. Admission applications through the Ontario University Application Centre (OUAC) "have been consistently above one hundred over the past four years"



according to Professor Stephen Ritchie, Coordinator of the ADVL program. The program admissions requirements are rigorous and admission to ADVL is capped at 14 students each year. The program is also unique in Canada since it leverages the strength of a Bachelor of Physical and Health Education (BPHE) with a specialization in Outdoor Adventure Leadership. This firm grounding in understanding the human body, physical education, health and nutrition balanced with the diverse issues and needs surrounding the outdoor adventure industry ensures that graduates from the program are uniquely qualified as outdoor leaders in Canada and beyond.

For more information on the Outdoor Adventure Leadership Program at Laurentian University, visit www.humankinetics.laurentian.ca.

Full-time instructor in the School of Human Kinetics at Laurentian University, Jim Little enjoys canoe tripping, running whitewater in the Sudbury region and hanging out with his wife, Jenny, and 2½-year-old son, Finn.